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# University Libraries

## Archival Chronicle

### Archival Chronicle

August 2010: Volume 29, Number 2

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### Centennial Perspectives: One Hundred Years of Student Life at BGSU

Education extends beyond the classroom and library. For many students, college is their first time living away from home. They live in close contact with a diverse group in their residence halls, form life-long personal relationships, make early professional contacts, share common interests, and work toward goals both large and small in the organizations they join. And to occupy their time when their day's work is done, there are sports, clubs, parties, and "just talk." While these aspects of student life have remained constant throughout Bowling Green State University's one hundred years, the way that students experience their time here is very much a reflection of the changing culture of our nation.

#### Pre-War Student Life - 1910-1940

Established as a teacher training institution, BGSU's earliest classes attracted not only those interested in becoming teachers, but also those who had been educators for many years and wanted to complete course work to secure state certification, either through the two-year "normal" program or the four-year degree program (see the [First Annual Catalog](#), available online). Because teaching was one of the few professions that welcomed women during the early twentieth century, women students far outnumbered the men. As early as 1918, the women took charge of their own conduct with the [Women's League](#) (later called the Women's Self-Government Association or the Association of Women Students) which established rules of conduct, appropriate dress, and curfew hours for all women students, making it one of the earliest such organizations in the country. Even so, women's lives were much more circumscribed than we are accustomed to today. The [Women's Handbook](#) from 1938, gives an idea of the discipline expected in residence hall life at the time.





Students attending during the first decade of the college's existence were very aware of their responsibility to establish campus traditions. They modeled these traditions on those of other colleges of the time. Each class elected its own officers, planning fundraisers and social and cultural events for its members and for the campus as a whole. Student organizations included the Country Life Club (since many students not only grew up on farms but also expected to teach in rural schools), the Gold Mask Club (which produced plays), musical organizations (Treble Clef Club, orchestra, and marching band), and the Emerson and Wilson Literary Societies. All students were required to attend chapel every week. In practice, this was an opportunity to gather the entire student body together for announcements and to provide a lecture on a cultural or current affairs topic or a short concert.

Still others took on the task of promoting the college. The string quartet gave concerts in area high schools, raising awareness of classical music while "boosting" the college. Coaches took time out to advise high school sports teams before tournament season. Even as an undergraduate, Ivan Lake travelled northwest Ohio speaking to high school classes about the benefits of a college education. Homecoming became an annual tradition, linking alumni with their alma mater.

Freshman hazing was part of every student's experience at Bowling Green. The new students were required to obey a strict set of rules established by upperclassmen. They were required to wear beanies (or sometimes green hair ribbons for the women), obey the commands of upperclassmen for such personal services as carrying books and opening doors, and be able to sing the school song on demand. According to the **Freshman Handbook** of 1940, "Any Freshman violating the rules will be honored with a free, conducted trip to the fish pond behind the Science Building. There he will be assured that he is not the first yearling to test the temperature of the four foot waters." At the end of two weeks, a tug-of-war between the freshmen and sophomores marked the end of hazing. The freshmen almost always won.

### War-time and the Post-War Era - 1941-1960



World War II created huge changes in campus life. Before the war, the numbers of men and women enrolled had been equalizing as the curriculum grew to include business administration and other pre-professional majors. When the war broke out, men were drafted or enlisted in the military and seemed to disappear from campus. However, the Navy brought them back. The V-5 and V-12 programs brought sailors and marines to BGSU to for aviation and officer corps training. The academic calendar was adjusted to fit the needs of the Navy's training schedule and dorms were taken over for housing. In other respects, the V-program students fit in with conventional campus activities, participating in sports and performing in plays.

Fraternities and sororities, long a part of the campus social scene, were organizations with membership by invitation. BGSU's first President Homer Williams had considered the college too new to host chapters of national Greek letter societies. By the time President Frank Prout took the helm, the time seemed right. One after another, local groups like the Five Brothers, or Phratra "went national" and became chapters of national organizations. The

influence of the Greeks on every aspect of social life, other clubs, and student government (now established for the entire student body) was profound. Their members took leadership positions all over campus and their celebrations and public events were high points in the year's social calendar.

During Sadie Hawkins Week (inspired by the popular comic strip Li'l Abner), women were encouraged to "do the askin', datin' and payin'." The end of the year was marked with the crowning of the May Queen and her court, held in conjunction with campus-wide recognition for students who had earned awards and honors over the course of the year. The Falcon's Nest was constructed to provide a place for students to gather and socialize outside of their classrooms and dormitories, and it quickly became the most popular spot on campus.

Following the war there was a huge increase in enrollment. Thanks to the G. I. Bill, thousands of returning servicemen were able to attend college. Married students made up a significant part of the campus population for the first time. Campus facilities were stretched beyond their capacities and "temporary" buildings acquired from the military were put to use for housing (see The Huts), dining halls (see Commons), and classrooms. The curriculum had expanded far beyond teacher training as Bowling Green became a first-rate liberal arts university. New majors called for new buildings, and with the development of a master plan for growth, construction took off. By the late 1950s, the Falcon's Nest had been replaced with a modern Student Union, with space for organization meetings, socializing, and even a bowling alley.

*At left, an activity card with the student's photograph showed that she had paid her activity fee for the semester and was entitled to be admitted to football and basketball games, concerts, and many dances.*

Every student paid an activity fee which supported the BG News, Key Yearbook, sports tickets, and entertainments such as dances, plays, and concerts. Students had a say in how the money was allocated. No building on campus could hold the entire student body, so the practice of required chapel was discontinued. In its place were an artist series (mostly concerts) and an entertainment series, supported by the activity fee.

The 1954 Freshman Handbook listed activities for students including intramural sports, women's sports, dance, politics, service organizations, religious groups, music, speech and dramatics (including WBGU FM radio), and departmental and interest area clubs. Bridge was very popular and there was an active club offering instruction in this card game and every level of competition, from local to national. (Steidtman, MS 350)







With so much change happening in the post-war era, there was bound to be friction. Unprecedented growth led to improvements in the quality of faculty, a broader curriculum, the creation of new programs of study and the expansion of the Graduate College. In the early days of the college, faculty were often tapped for administrative duties. In the 1950s, faculty also expected to have a say in how the university was run and to be able to express themselves freely. Meanwhile, students were put on notice that student council (in existence since the 1930s) was a privilege that had to be earned. When popular faculty were summarily dismissed in 1961, students took to the streets to demonstrate their support, and President Ralph McDonald soon resigned.

Under the leadership of President William Jerome, enrollment boomed during the 1960s. Students began to push back against long-time disciplinary rules—they fought for and won the right to live off-campus, to have men and women live in the same residence halls, and eliminated curfews for women. They were also affected by trends in national politics. As students became more politically aware, they asked for and received credit for community service and got time off to participate in voter registration drives and political campaigns. Minority students founded the Black Student Union and the Latino Student Union to speak for their causes. Women, too, demanded equal treatment socially, politically, and in the content of the curriculum. On what had been a traditionally conservative campus, student debate raged about the war in Vietnam.

Thanks to students' actions during the spring of 1970, a "New University" operated on campus for several semesters which featured seminars that were not available in the traditional curriculum. Mostly taught by university faculty, these seminars influenced the evolution of the course content in the formal classroom. Class titles included Popular Democracy, The Greeks (the fraternity's role in reducing alienation of the student), Pollution Control and Coordination, Jazz (not then offered as a major), and Minority Groups in Children's Literature. Still other courses reflected contemporary themes—Christian Views of Contemporary Problems, Civil Disobedience, Conscience and the Draft, and Conventional Authoritarianism and Its Relationship to University Governance and Individual Student Responsibility.

#### Economic Challenges and the Way Forward - 1986-2010

The last quarter-century of BGSU's history was marked by economic boom and bust at the state and national level. Once again, students looked to their education to provide them with the skills they needed to make a living in a changing world. As Ohio cut back its contribution to the university's budget, the cost of tuition skyrocketed. At the same time, enrollment squeezed available resources and many students found it impossible to complete their course work in the traditional four years. A job on campus, either through work study or regular employment was often part of a student's experience. Non-traditional adult learners returned to campus or found classes and services through Continuing Education.

At the same time, technology was the driving force behind huge changes in students' lives, both in the classroom and personally. Personal CD players and desktop computers gave way to cell phones, i-pods, blackberries and laptops. Students could always be in touch with their friends or professors. Most classes developed an online component allowing for group discussion, consultation, and term paper development. New campus facilities such as Olscamp Hall were built to make technology integral with the classroom. As the nation put greater emphasis on wellness, the Student Recreation Center and the Perry Field House provided students with a place to keep fit and to compete through intramural sports and intercollegiate athletics.



Probably the most defining characteristic of student life in recent years is the way the campus and the wider community have come to interact. Students have always been generous with their time, their talent, and what money they could spare. This continues today in the campus' largest and best-known charitable event, Dance Marathon, which raises money for the Children's Miracle Network through the efforts of hundreds of participants. Programs such as Service-Learning seek to join students' interest in gaining real-world experience with their desire to build connections to their communities, promote justice, and support economic development through for-credit classes and extracurricular activities. Today, over three hundred registered student organizations provide opportunities for students to grow professionally, personally, and spiritually through involvement with the arts, community service, politics, recreation, or their own special interests.

Today's students are open, engaged, and becoming an ever more-active part of the world beyond the campus. Who knows what the future will bring?

—Lee N. McLaird